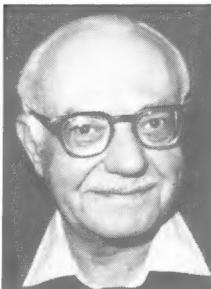


# Video Art

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### SHALOM GOREWITZ: Metaphoric Image Manipulator

Where does an artful videographer show his work? If he's Shalom Gorewitz who believes that "video doesn't exist in a vacuum," the answer might well be—everywhere—providing you tailor your work to suit the right audience. His tapes have been "experienced" in such varied places as bars and restaurants, galleries, universities, discos, museums, rock clubs, libraries, art schools, on television as well as on cable. Shalom's manipulated images have been seen on a single monitor or on a battery of 12 suspended above a dance floor, or blown up and silent on a 40-foot diagonal screen synchronous to the beat of contemporary music.

"You have to choose which tapes work in which environment, otherwise

you can get the wrong exposure not only for yourself, but for all videographers. Since I make all kinds of tapes, I try to choose the right program for the right audience in the right environment." Gorewitz is willing to go in all directions, showing personal, emotionally-wrenching tapes as well as those that are less personal but "aesthetically entertaining." It's problematical whether an artist can wisely choose an audience for his own oeuvres. The work, once produced, develops a life of its own and seems to seek its own audience. It takes the unique gifts of an impresario to bring art and public together successfully.

Well aware of audiences and video's time-based characteristics, Shalom

prefers to make short-sequenced, fast-paced tapes. His synthesized, colorized, multi-layered symbolic and metaphoric images usually require more than one viewing to decipher. He shows his tapes at various stages of completion to his wife, Peggy Kay, as well as to a limited number of friends. Feedback is important to him. "I know what I want to say, but I also listen to others who at times help me to tighten up a work. It takes a lot of self-discipline to know when to cut a tape."

Gorewitz classifies his prodigious output in groups and series in order to facilitate programming. His tape listings include: Color Field Abstractions, Travel, Rock Videotapes, Narrative Abstractions, Image Refractions, Raster, Poetry Videotapes, Dance Videotapes, and North Rockland Landscapes. He tends to re-edit his images from time to time, producing various versions of an original work. Rather than recall titles, you would do better seeing several of his videotapes, ascertain where the artist is coming from and if you have a congruent sensibility, you'll enjoy whatever you behold. When I discovered Shalom's re-cycling tendency, I compared him to another image-maker par excellence. He agreed, saying: "Of course, Paik was my teacher."

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**Shalom Gorewitz**

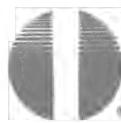
In whatever category Shalom Gorewitz arbitrarily places his finished work, his tapes are usually composed of material captured with a Super-8 camera or a portapak—images having been recorded in a form of a continuing personal diary depicting people, places and personal moods of the moment. Through electronic processing, usually done at the Experimental Television Center (ETC) in Owego, New York, the original images are selected, rearranged, edited, synthesized, colorized and layered in such a manner as to create vibrant bursts of complex visual impulses resulting in a personal, metaphoric dream world. The work stands up very well on its own, but when Gorewitz synchronizes it to the beat of rock or disco, the effect is often mesmerizing.

In *Narrative Abstractions*, he works abstractly with the image, the "narrative" supplied by an event taking place over a period of time. He uses voice-over to highlight the experience, the "internal" abstract images acting as counterpoint. "I use voice-over to explain the images because when I work with a very complicated image flow I feel I need to make the work more accessible. It's almost like lyrics and instrumentation—the instrumentation being abstract, the lyrics lending the work its concreteness." While the analogy is interesting, the concept of abstract images with voice-over narration doesn't always work.

The *Travel Series* are Betamax sketches derived by Gorewitz taking a Sony DXC-1610 camera with him on his travels, then directly transferring the images to ½-inch cassettes. "They are impressions of places—torn pages—condensed highlights." Later, when the images are electronically processed, the result is super. When the images remain "straight," they often look like indiscriminate snap-shootings.

*Color Field Abstractions* are sources for the *Rock Videotapes*—evocative images resting silent or with natural sound, waiting to be used. Gorewitz magically transforms them into masterpieces of overlapped, dense images wrapped in colorful garments that twitch and pulsate to the rhythms of today's popular musical sounds.

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Gorewitz considers his Image Refractions Series as experiments in ½-inch black and white editing, working actively with two decks resulting in fragments of edited images with "explosions" between them—working non-cinematically with video, trying to use the flow and to see what happens to the images as part of the editing process. Shalom "goes with the work" by neither letting the medium control him nor attempting to control the medium.

He showed me a tape whose original imagery was captured on Super-8 film, mostly edited in the camera. "I was very depressed at the time," said Shalom. "I had the blues. When I left the city, I decided that I would not hold the camera to my eye but rather use it as an extension of my nervous system. I clicked single-frame bursts of rhythm according to the way I was feeling at the moment. On the beach there was a certain kind of clicking, then it cools off. When I get back to the city, it builds up again, then there is a collapse at the end—the filmic frame collapses.

"I then brought the film to ETC. I transferred it to tape electronically, where I could stop on a frame. One of the reasons I like film is that I could freeze a concrete frame and work with it—put my colors on it, do my voltage control—my oscillation—that will match the feeling of that part of the tape. Then I played that section through with the video effect on top of the filmic effect." That's how Shalom Gorewitz described the making of *Parataxis*.

An example of his Rock Videotapes is *Chicago Sunset* with music by John McLaughlin. Because he was lonely for New York while on a visit to Chicago, Shalom used the song "New York on My Mind" played on the guitar. He then electronically processed the experimental images he shot in Chicago, choreographed the images to the music, and produced a personal statement as well as illustrations for the song for people to enjoy.

*Dance This Mess Around* is a work

that existed in another form, which Shalom had the opportunity to show at Hurrah's Rock Disco, New York. Rather than have it played against any music, he chose a song by the B-52s he felt was meaningful for the occasion.

*Desire* and *Travelin' Round the World*, with music by Oleg, are two of Shalom Gorewitz's most exciting Rock Videotapes. Shalom originally used a Betamax portapak and a DXC-1610 with lenses of different focal length and then processed the images. Musician Oleg's fantastically photogenic face goes through different "make-up" changes not only to help keep the tape going, but to add interest and emotional content to the tape. Shalom shot the performance six times, choreographed it differently each time, then at the end, it was all lip synched. What motivated Gorewitz to move away from and then return to the original imagery, working off permutations of the original black and white, adding negatives and splashing discreet color in the right places and at the right time, is a kind of visual aesthetic that works admirably.

*Desire* is particularly fluid in execution since the camera, the lights and the subjects were in motion. Shalom's choreographic talent enhanced and elevated the disco song to great heights. His knowledge of the emotional and psychological effects of lighting is well demonstrated and used to telling effect in this tape.

While some people working in video might conceptualize everything beforehand, Shalom might begin a work, leave it and then finish it at a later date. "When I go to ETC I often don't know how my work is going to end up. I know that I'm going after a certain effect, building up the work dimensionally. I may try a few ways of editing, then I look at the result. If I'm not satisfied, I shelve the material until something happens. In the case of *Travelin' Round the World*, Oleg played the song, and I knew immediately that I had the images to metaphorically illustrate the piece,

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and I went from there.

"I put the song on tape along with the pre-composed musical score, then I put my images synchronized to it. First I listen to the song many times. I write the lyrics down. I notice and note how much is devoted to each section—what the instrumentation is—when I want the images to come forward, when I want them to recede. Then I edit to the beat. I think of my tape as narrative illustrations to the song." In the process, Shalom succeeded in giving the talented musician, Oleg, a vivid video personality.

Shalom Gorewitz is a shy, emotion-laden, sensitive individual whose background and natural tendencies led him to express himself through film and video. His deep, awesome feelings are sometimes trapped in the medium, his personal metaphors not always transmitted to viewers. For example, I asked him to explain what I considered to be a needless, casual close-up of a man's face toward the end of *Excavations*, a short tape from his Color Field Abstractions Series.

"To me this tape is very symbolic," Shalom said in a hesitant whisper. "It begins and ends at the memorial on the mountain overlooking Jerusalem. The man represents my brother, my grandfather and the people who died in the War for Independence. He is like a ghost figure talking to me," finished Shalom. Although I hadn't grasped the import of the visual metaphor, I realized that I had touched a sensitive spot. I was fortunate to have had the artist explain the work. Not all aspects of a highly personal statement need be, nor could be grasped by all viewers. It's enough that the artist is willing to take risks of exposure.

We returned to technique and how and why it serves its purposes. "When I colorize," said Shalom, "it's because I want to add symbolic value to what I felt at the time." Gorewitz plans to go more and more into image processing in order to express his deep feelings. Ideologically dogmatic people are often upset when he tells them that he still works in film. Even in his early years he was interested in film image manipulation by physically distorting the base material. And because Shalom works in both media, he strongly believes that there is a crossover. He works hard at bringing filmmakers and videographers together to engage in a continuous dialogue for their mutual benefit.

Not all of Shalom's original imagery is processed. "Some things lend themselves to image processing, others are themselves as real images," he said cryptically. "When I am moved by an experience I tend to share it with others in a realistic way." When Gorewitz wants to express deeper feelings, he turns to image processing, leaving surface emo-



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A scene from Gorewitz's "Excavations."



A scene from the artist's "Oleg's Desire."



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tions to be expressed through "real life" images. He made an analogy to painting—between the feelings expressed via a sketch and those expressed through a more formalized large painting or mural.

Shalom's dream is to have his tapes receive repeated showings. He considers *Excavations* one of his richest tapes both in terms of craft and image symbolism. There is a great deal to be found in more complex, layered images if one only had the opportunity, the time and the inclination to view a work many times. A

tape of this kind should be savored once or twice then placed on a shelf to be brought down again and again to unwind on a VCR—the result could be repeated interludes of discovery and re-discovery.

Shalom Gorewitz considers himself an artist rather than a teacher even though he has taught video art at the University of Bridgeport for the past seven years and is also an adjunct professor in television at Hofstra University. Wherever he shows his tapes, he welcomes and enjoys fielding questions. On his year-long weekly public access cable show, *Raster* (1977-1978), he typed messages at the beginning of his tapes to explain what the audience was seeing, reassuring the viewers that while they might be seeing something unusual, it would neither harm them nor their sets. Shalom believes that throwing something new at people only turns them off. "You have to give them a reason, a benefit, to watch."

Last December, Shalom curated the Image Processing Show at the Kitchen Center, New York. "Besides having program notes and descriptions of each tape for the public, I had one evening set aside for myself and the other artists in the show to have a free, open screening—to give a chance for a give-and-take—something that hasn't been

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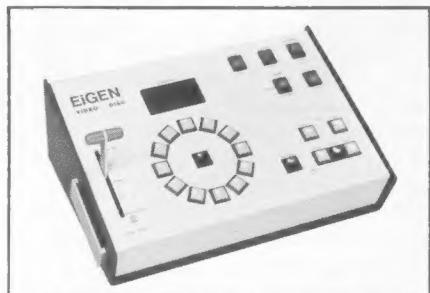
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done in some time. Over 100 people came to participate in a fabulous dialogue."

Shalom Gorewitz contends that he had a very inter-disciplinary background. "My mother is an opera singer, my father was manager-accountant for Martha Graham, John Cage, Robert Rauschenberg and a lot of other artists. So growing up, I was exposed and influenced by the arts. I started making films while in high school, then became involved with video at Antioch College, where I had my own show the first year. I later dropped out of school for lack of funds.

"I received my B.F.A. at the California Institute of the Arts when Nam June Paik was building his first synthesizer. I lived with a portapak for a year. I didn't think of video as an art form although I was studying film as art." Shalom considered videotape a cheap way of making films or as a way of doing television. When he left Cal Arts, he went right into the film industry, becoming an assistant producer doing audio work on a number of industrial and feature-length films.

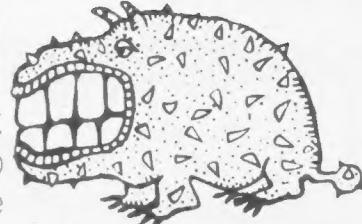
After a sojourn in Israel working on a program about the City of Jerusalem with David Cort, he really became involved with video. He continued his studies on the more theoretical side of the medium at the Center for Understanding Media (originally Antioch's graduate school, now a part of the New School, New York).

This past summer, Shalom produced a work using a Quantel digital computer. *Travels*, a 28-minute, color, broadcast-quality tape is a compilation of images from his Travel Series. "This amazing machine helped to clarify my images and solved many of the technical difficulties inherent in image processing. It has the ability to zoom in on a frame and reposition it. If you have a slight blanking problem, you're able to overcome that, too. I was able to slow down some of my images—to extend them for more image retention—and also to put a rhythmic counterpoint to the kind of sequencing that I was doing at ETC. Quantel is famous for noise reduction as well."

Shalom Gorewitz likened the work he did on the Quantel to "images placed in an expensive frame in order to clarify and enrich them." Basically, he took a series of images he worked on during the year and did a final one-inch edit on the Quantel. *Travels* has been chosen by Independent Cinema Artists & Producers (ICAP) for distribution to the cable market.

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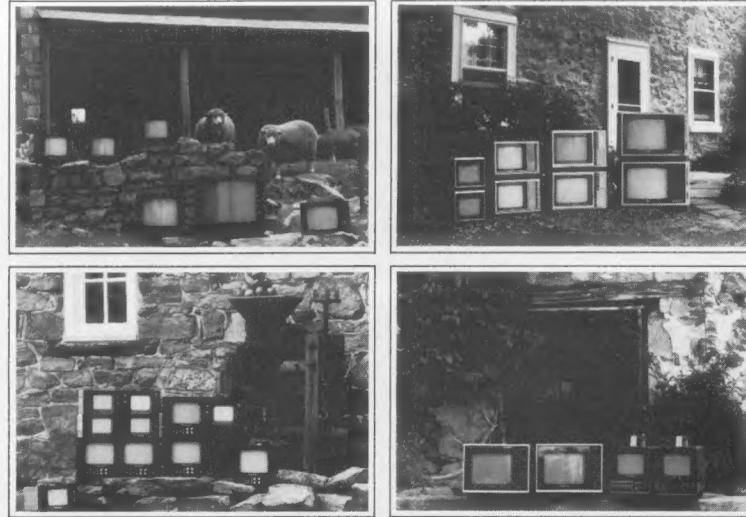
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